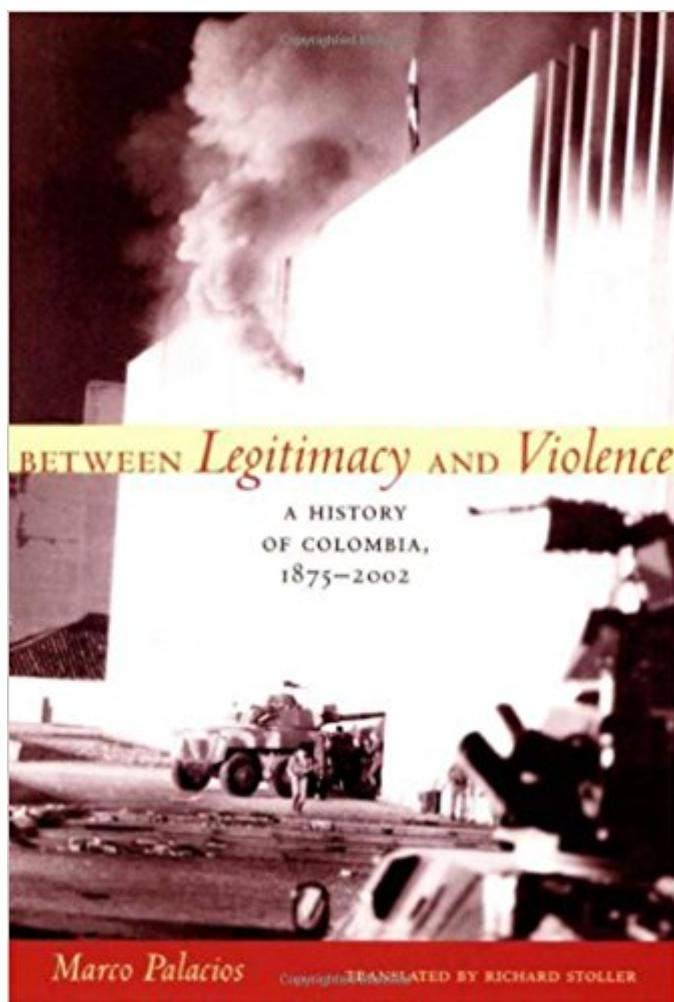


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# Between Legitimacy And Violence: A History Of Colombia, 1875–2002 (Latin America In Translation)



## Synopsis

Between Legitimacy and Violence is an authoritative, sweeping history of Colombia's long twentieth century, from the tumultuous civil wars of the late nineteenth century to the drug wars of the late twentieth. Marco Palacios, a leading Latin American historian, skillfully blends political, economic, social, and cultural history. In an expansive chronological narrative full of vivid detail, he explains Colombia's political history, discussing key leaders, laws, parties, and ideologies; corruption and inefficiency; and the paradoxical nature of government institutions, which, while stable and enduring, are unable to prevent frequent and extreme outbursts of violence. Palacios traces the trajectory of the economy, addressing agriculture (particularly the economic significance of coffee), the development of a communication and transportation infrastructure, industrialization, and labor struggles. Palacios also gives extensive attention to persistent social inequalities, the role of the Catholic Church, demographic shifts such as urbanization and emigration, and Colombia's relationship with the United States. Offering a comparative perspective, he frequently contrasts Colombia with other Latin American nations. Throughout, Palacios offers a helpful interpretive framework, connecting developments with their causes and consequences. By thoroughly illuminating Colombia's past, *Between Legitimacy and Violence* sheds much-needed light on the country's violent present.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Marco Palacios's comprehensive, skilled narration of Colombia's turbulent long twentieth century is the best one-volume history of that country we have. There is nothing else

available in English that provides even a shadow of the complexity and completeness of Palaciosâ™s book.â• "Ann Farnsworth-Alvear, author of *Dulcinea in the Factory: Myths, Morals, Men, and Women in Colombia*â™s Industrial Experiment, 1905â"1960âœA skillful historian, Palacios gives the public a sharp, broad and yet very complete view of Colombiaâ™s twentieth-century history . . . . Students of Latin American studies will benefit greatly from this valuable account of Colombiaâ™s history. Anyone interested in Colombia and its history will find this a most valuable and complete history guide. The author is an authority in the field and his own life experiences have permitted him to step outside the turmoil and violence of Colombia to produce a book that gives an intellectual, organized, and logical order to its turbulent history.â• (Debora Cordeiro-Rosa The Latin Americanist)âœMarco Palaciosâ™ account of Colombian history is a must-read for historians, economists, political scientists, and geographers. It is an intricately woven story that highlights the complexities of Colombian history. . . . A rich interpretation of Colombian history is presented with the expressed intent of revealing how the past affects current thinking and events.â• (Sheila Amin GutiÃ©rrez de PiÃ©res E.I.A.L.)

"Marco Palacios's comprehensive, skilled narration of Colombia's turbulent 'long twentieth century' is the best one-volume history of that country we have. There is nothing else available in English that provides even a shadow of the complexity and completeness of Palacios's book."--Ann Farnsworth-Alvear, author of "Dulcinea in the Factory: Myths, Morals, Men, and Women in Colombia's Industrial Experiment, 1905-1960"

The chosen time frame of Marcos Palacios history of Colombia may appear arbitrary at its beginning and unfortunate at its end. The former charge is somewhat put to rest by the authorÃ¢Â™s explanation that his story begins Ã¢Â^with the notable increase in commercial, technological, and intellectual activities in the North Atlantic region after the mid-nineteenth century. The latter falls in the category of Ã¢Â^just one of those things.Ã¢Â™This reader writes these lines in 2017, fifteen eventful years after the bookÃ¢Â™s final bookend, if one may say things in this way. More that is very good than that which is appalling has occurred in the ensuing decade and a half, which means that Palacios' fine book might end on a more hopeful note if he were laying down his pen today. The authorsÃ¢Â™ six chapters are arranged chronologically, with admittedly porous boundaries between them because some events and processes fail to obey this kind of delimitation:Ã¢Â^Ã¢Â^From Liberal Decay to RegenerationÃ¢Â^Ã¢Â^ Liberal Economics, Conservative PoliticsÃ¢Â^Ã¢Â^ From the Expansion of Citizenship to the Plutocratic EliteÃ¢Â^Ã¢Â^ In the Shadow of the ViolenceÃ¢Â^Ã¢Â^

An Elusive Legitimacy

Great Transformation within Continuity

Before jumping into Palacios' reading of Colombian history per se, a word about the book's structure is in order. Each chapter is preceded by an italicized 1-3 page orientation to its content. One encounters these pages not so much as an introduction as an executive summary.

For the reader who is new to the eccentricities and nuances of Colombian history I raise my hand this feature is profoundly helpful. Palacios' first chapter (*From Liberal Decay to Regeneration*) introduces us to the voice of an historian who will have his finger on the economic pulse of the nation whose development he narrates. The book is data-rich, not least in this first chapter. Palacios skillfully weaves these data together in a manner that builds a kaleidoscope whose main lines, shapes, and colors come gradually into perspective. The chapter picks up with the near-death experience of Colombian Liberalism at a time when the country as a whole was astonishingly unpopulated, with immense sectors of the population almost completely out of touch with the political discussions of Colombia's elites: 'At the start of the 1870s three-quarters of the country, the so-called national territories, were uninhabited or contained only indigenous populations beyond the reach of church or state. The eastern mountains, which has the highest population density, contained 42 percent of the total population. But even some of the most fertile highland areas were underutilized, a situation that could be summed up as 'land without people and people without land'.

The colonization associated with the opening of "national lands" tended to combine aspects of violent adventure and commercial enterprise. It was characterized fundamentally by instability, itinerancy, and a strongly masculine ethic. Coffee and cattle were the economic engines that drove the frontiers of populated land deeper into the national territory, with a weak state following behind in many cases to normalize the new status quo. As electoral rolls grew, which they inevitably did, Palacios' pessimistic observation is that the growing political consciousness, at least for some, (was) not matched by institutional development. Under such conditions, an increase in political violence was not a surprising outcome. In similar contexts the world over, elections were based not on individuals' rational and voluntary choices but on collective demonstrations of symbolic belonging "rites of identity".

If Liberal decay paved the way for conservative *Regeneration*, Palacios is scathing in his description of it: 'The 1886 Constitution was centralist more in its strengthening of the presidency at the expense of the legislature that in its strengthening of the national government at the expense of the regions. It promised the temporal power of the church and paved the way for a half-century of Conservative regimes of various huge. It restricted individual liberties, and both the size and the iconoclastic vitality of the Colombian press went into decline. The

broadsheets and often irresponsible newspapers that flourished during the federal period were supplanted by obtuse religious titles. NÃºÃ©ez and Caro, two men fresh from the "republic of letters," used the idea of a "responsible press" to close avenues of expression to their opponents, with variable success. Authoritarian values replaced liberal ultra-individualism. One orthodoxy took the place of another, but the Regenerations' form of cronyism was more exclusivist and voracious because it enjoyed grater fiscal resources.'We are introduced here to some of the dualities that nourished the awful 'War of a Thousand Days' and have recurred in Colombia up to the present time. The series of civil wars that occurred in the period under review, in Palacios' telling, 'reinforced party affiliations and sustained party mythologies.' The retelling of their battles 'deepened antagonism and suspicious between Colombians even as the elite sought to recast them as heroic episodes that ought to produce a common desire for reconciliation.' The wars also discredited both parties (Conservative and Liberal) in the eyes of disguised Panamanian elites to a degree that facilitated the humiliating loss of Panama (and its eventual canal).The reader learns to recognize the distinctly Colombian scent of opportunity lost: 'Few Latin American countries have a nineteenth-century electoral history as rich and as continues as Colombia's. Even so, electoral participation generally did not promote debates that enriched public life, strengthened tolerance, or created an institutional culture able to resolve conflicts. Legalism and the unreflective faith in the intrinsic virtues of the representative system of government coexisted with the common acceptance of violence as a valid method for gaining and holding power.'The title of the book's second chapter ('Liberal Economics, Conservative Politics') could arguably apply as well to other periods of Colombia history or even as a loose motto for its entirety, since it abbreviates a combination that has had particular resonance in Colombia when compared with the trajectory of other Latin American countries.The broken dawn of a new peace that appeared in 1902 ushered in a period in the nation's history when coffee would become, if not king, then a powerful prince. New modes of production, with coffee at the forefront, rewrote the regional map, even as the influential power over the horizon became the United States rather than one or another European actors.A particularly rich paragraph illustrates Palacios' signature insight into the interplay of economics and both national and international politics:'Until the 1980s coffee took center stage in the economy. Here we should point out four constants that affected cultivators, merchants, and governments alike. All are based on the fundamental reality that the coffee economy depends on a factor beyond its control, the expansion of world demand. This is why no serious consideration was given to improving either labor productivity or technology until the late

1940s, though some attention was paid to increasing domestic consumption of coffee. First among these constants is that coffee is produced exclusively in the tropics, unlike sugar, tobacco, or cotton, which can (with varying efficiency) be produced in temperate zones; it is not a necessity of life, on the order of wheat and petroleum; and it can be stored for long periods. Thus it encourages speculation, which translates into high levels of price instability—year to year, month to month, even day to day. Second, coffee has no economies of scale, and until the 'green revolution' reached coffee in the mid-1970s, the only way to increase production was to employ more land and more labor. Third, coffee has little elasticity of supply and demand; that is, it takes a big price swing to make consumers stop drinking it or to make cultivators stop producing it. Fourth, periodic frosts in Brazil play a major role in world prices: the relative shortage in world supply promotes new plantings; inventories build up over the next few years; and despite the efforts of producing countries to let them accumulate, prices inevitably fall.'So does Palacios guide his reader through 20th-century transformations that, though incremental from any one angle of vision, added up to something quite massive. As new economic possibilities rewrote the internal map in terms both regional and socio-demographic, Colombia also came to terms—in a manner of speaking—with the new hemispheric colossus up north. For Palacios, Marco Fidel Suárez embodies a new conservative realism that saw the United States as the North Star and Colombia's natural ally.'To Suárez, Colombia's dilemma was whether or not to industrialize. The new society would surely be forged on the basis of the natural sciences, private initiative, and charity of the traditional conservative sort, but the relative weight of each component was yet to be determined. Put another way, Colombia had to combine the materialism of the North Star with the pontifical doctrines of the *Rerum novarum*. Technology and the instruments of capitalism were welcome and necessary, but they could not be allowed to affect the Catholic peasant soul of a Colombia the Conservatives and the church feared to lose. This recipe of Catholic social doctrine and Yankee progress would put its stamp on the "progressive conservatism" for the rest of the century.'Indeed. The recipe also stands in as proxy for a world view that would be both highly represented and fiercely contested in the many conflicts of the century in review and even on into the 21st. This very long chapter, which perhaps should have been divided into more than one, we read of the Catholic church's strong support of Conservative government as well as its internal divisions—which quickly became external given the Church's deep involvement in the societal questions of the day—the rise of relatively organized labor movements and the conflict with business owners of which the most egregious event was the *Ciudadela* massacre, the emergence of oil as a major economic and political fact on

the ground, and the expansion of the electorate that led to the eventual demise of Conservative hegemony. When the troubled period 1930-1958 comes in for review (Chapter 3, “From the Expansion of Citizenship to the Plutocratic Elite”), Palacios prefers to join the two conventional periods (1930-46, the Liberal republic and 1946-58, state of siege and dictatorship) in the interest of viewing the consolidation of a new national economy that runs from the beginning to the end of these dates. It was a time of personalized political movements that bore the surnames of their leaders. These leaders, across party lines, can be classed as ‘ideologues/mobilizers (extremists)’ or ‘administrators (moderates)’, who respectively “desired to remake the nature and goals of the state or to modernize existing governmental institutions. Once again, Colombia’s fate rested atop overlapping tectonic plates: Colombia was still an economic mosaic; some regional elites were openly hostile to protectionism while others could not thrive without it. By and large the governments of the Liberal Republic sided with the protectionists, led by Medellín textile producers, against the free-traders, led by coastal landed interests. In political terms the cost was stymied by its own internal mosaic” differing agendas and cultures among the strictly coastal towns such as Cartagena, Barranquilla, and Santa Marta and between those towns and the inland centers of Sincelejo, Montería, and Valledupar and by the reluctance of the elites to mobilize the black and mulatto majorities of the region in defense of coastal interests. In the end the coastal elite had to tolerate not only protectionism but a stereotype of their rural economy as backward, invented in Medellín. The Liberal Republic saw the rise of a relatively professionalized army that would now serve the interests of national security rather than internal suppression and of organized coffee interests that would in some ways fill the vacuum left by the perennially weak state. Partisans on both sides of the Liberal-Conservative line(s) of tension began to map over their experience the Republican and Nationalist identities of the ‘old country’, which exploded into the Civil War of 1936-39. Palacios places this ominous political environment into context and to some degree sheds light on the limitations of the comparison with the Iberian tumult when he observes that ‘Colombia in the 1930s was still very much an agrarian society, one of the poorest in Latin America. Life expectancy toward the end of the decade was only 40 years for men and 44 for women. Although the urban population rose steadily, 70 percent of the population was still rural.’ The persistent divide between the nation’s elites and the rural poor “almost as though living in separate universes” was captured by an official report from Cundinamarca in the early 1930s, which observed that for the rural poor ... ‘... (t)heir relationship with the state was always negative: ‘For the tenant the government is (a) a mayor who

throws him in jail for a law he didn't know about; (b) the authority who throws him in jail for making or drinking contraband liquor; (c) the authority that charges road and bridge tolls; and (d) the authority who is quick to evict him whenever the landowner requests it."Church-vs.-secular tensions throbbed in a way that had been covered up by the prior Conservative Hegemony. As sectors of the rural poor found a political voice, elites saw terror and subterfuge at every turn. In this 'fevered environment' and amid resurgent tensions around the appropriate nature of education, Jesuits founded Bogota's Universidad Javeriana (1931) and the Archdiocese of Medellín established the Universidad Pontificia Javeriana (1936). The increasing inability of the Liberal Republic to resolve these tensions at a time when international Communism and anti-Communism threw additional fuel unto the fire. The cumulative effects of economic growth and sociocultural change presaged an era of dislocations and conflicts. To face down these challenges, the Colombian political system, like many in Latin America and southern Europe, had to resort to dictatorial methods. The collapse of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán's populist Liberal movement (1948) lent credence to the idea that Colombia was not sufficiently mature for democracy, because its political and social movements tended to emphasize income redistribution. The words 'had to' in the quoted passage (emphasis added) on the part of Palacios or his translator are surprising, for the book shows no reflex for determinism, whether economic or political. Perhaps this underscores the dire environment that obtained at the eve of dictatorship, a governing model that has been remarkably scarce in Colombian experience. Palacios concludes his survey of dictatorship with the pessimistic observation that organized oligarchs and oligarchies were the principal beneficiaries of any 'stability' that it offered. Palacios turns next to that period of history that still sends causes Colombians who are thoughtful about their nation's past to shudder: *la violencia*. Because the chapter's English title does not italicize or place 'the Violence' within quotation marks, it is possible for the reader at first to miss that the reference is a proper noun that marks a specific period in Colombia's twentieth-century experience: 1958-1974. Palacios labors to narrate *la violencia* in a way that departs from quasi-official versions of the non-uniformed hell that broke loose in those years as 'one or another armed group, legal or illegal, would take over a territory and impose its control on the population'. The author shorthands this period as 'some twenty years of crime and impunity facilitated by political sectarianism' which dislocated the lives of tens of thousands of families and communities. Perhaps never has a functioning two-party democratic system failed its nation so utterly. 'The Violence is best seen as an expression of the chronic deficit of state authority, rather than as a manifestation of the state's collapse. In

fact, the state during this period was powerful enough to facilitate an unprecedented accumulation of capital: the plutocracy served itself with a big spoon through the 1950s, even as the socioeconomic gap widened. The state measured its legitimacy by the results of its macroeconomic policies, and even then it ignored key factors such as the transparency and efficiency of state subsidies, the improvement of industrial competitiveness, the waste and underutilization of the best agricultural lands, the excess concentration of income, growing social and regional inequalities, the housing shortage, and the chaotic growth of cities.'Although Colombia during *la violencia* looked nothing like what we call 'failed states' these days, it nonetheless experienced a trauma that is almost unimaginable in a country with such a respectable'even, at times, glowing' scorecard to hold up before its national elites and Colombia watchers internationally. If the 'deficit of state authority' in Colombia has indeed been chronic, seldom has it been felt more acutely as during the awful years that we bracket with two little words: *la violencia* (Chapter four, 'In the Shadow of the Violence')One of the marvels of Colombian political history'though deeply marred by unintended consequences' is the bipartisan effort at reaching beyond atavistic violence and towards a bipartisan mode of governance by the agreed alternating periods of power called the National Front (1958-1974). Yet Palacios describes even here a too typical co-option of power by the political elites (the two principal parties now working in a semblance of coordination) that 'repressed political dissidence and sought to coopt and control both the power and the emerging middle classes by widening their patronage networks. (The National Front) created a cynical alternative to the promised reconstruction of the world of citizenship.' Yet, via this odd mechanism, Colombia avoided the twentieth-century plague of Latin American military dictatorships, though both the military and the Church saw their influence consolidate and even increase during the period in question. So did an emerging technocratic elite personified by the 'young economist', with its promise of post-political and nearly prophetic insight and expertise. Palacios shows something close to contempt for these 'transnational' professionals who rotated 'between multilateral bureaucracies in Washington or elsewhere, and service in Colombia.' He seems to lament principally the technocrat's non-subordination to Colombian legal and cultural norms and his source of authority in transnational organizations with no political endorsement by Colombian society itself. This reality no doubt stands behind the chapter's title. The disenfranchisement that Palacios narrates in his view engendered the weakening and atomization of traditional labor and the rise of non-democratic actors Colombia's guerilla movements, drug cartels, and 'pariah capitalists'. This chapter makes for fascinating reading by anyone touched by the turbulent

dynamics of late-20th and early 21st-century Colombia. This reader intends to revisit it often. This fine volume's valedictory chapter ("Great Transformations within Continuity") brings the narrative through the conclusion of the 20th century and into the dawning of the 21st. The book's publication date is 2006, a detail that suggests that the eleven years between publication (more so, the fifteen years since the end date of its purview) and this reader's 2017 review could well be captured under the same rubric of great transformations within continuity. Palacios describes a nation of emigrants, a nation of cities (though without citizens), and an increasingly dominant urban culture (though in a context of "illegal cities"). The chapter makes for sober reading, as for repetition of a cynical observation flowing from the troubled 1980s and 1990s that echoes sentiments native to the period of *la violencia*: "The economy is doing well even though the country is doing badly." An unusually expansive epilogue allows Palacios to migrate into evaluative mode more than his descriptive task had permitted in the body of *Between Legitimacy and Violence*. One discerns a characteristically Colombia note of the vast chasm that continues to yawn between possibility and reality. Indeed, Palacios throughout this superb history has described a nation that is "in between" when viewed from almost any angle of view. It is a peculiarly Colombian conundrum. No matter how bad things become, possibility rarely fades entirely from view. No matter how much events might lead one to hope, reality brakes and gnaws. Yet the intervening fifteen years since Palacios presented us with this descriptive gift of a read have perhaps deposited their balance on the side of possibility. Even when one does not read it clearly in their prose, one glimpses in the eyes of so many Colombians the hopeful truth that the story has not yet been fully told. (Though this reader lacks access to the Spanish original, translator Richard Stoller's supple English prose gives every evidence of having produced an accurate and highly readable translation.)

Highly informative and compelling.

Amazing!!!

Palacios is the only author who managed to reflect the complexity of Colombia's history in almost every respect. Kudos for an excellent reading. I hope we'll have a new edition again soon.

Thank you so much!!the item that i ordered has come in a really nice conditionthat i expected.thanks again.

If you would like to know about Colombian modern history, this is a great book.

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